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# Comrades Under the Rainbow Flag: Public Expression, Regulation, and Questions Surrounding the LGBTQ Community in Contemporary Taiwan

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Comrades Under the Rainbow Flag:  
Public Expression, Regulation, and Questions Surrounding the LGBTQ Community in  
Contemporary Taiwan

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Seminar Director: Dr. Salgado

Long Analytical

## INTRODUCTION

A close look at the sexual politics and social climate of Taiwan, especially surrounding the LGBTQ community, reveals a strange and startling contradiction between greater acceptance of all sexual expression in the public sphere since the end of martial law in 1987 (Chen, Chiung-chi; Jiang; Wang) and increased regulation of sexuality by the Taiwanese government (Ho, “Queer Existence” 538). Public demonstrations have grown in number and the internet has allowed for the formation of a more accepting social space for LGBTQ people (Lin 272). However, the expression of their sexuality has actually become more restricted since the lifting of martial law due to the political intervention of Christian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Ho, “Queer Existence” 538). Laws passed at the behest of these groups with the stated intention of child protection have adversely restricted the more accepting social space for LGBTQ recently created in Taiwan by severely limiting their access to information and communication on the internet, an important source of community (551). Therefore, an apparent conflict has emerged between what seems to be a more accepting society, evidenced by increasingly popular public demonstrations and the formation and growth of a community, and greater regulation of that society. According to queer theorist Lee Edelman’s theory of “reproductive futurism,” the rights and freedoms of actual living LGBTQ people are subject to restriction based on the rights and wellbeing of future generations which represent the continuation of society (Edelman 11). Therefore, by examining the current societal and political state of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community through the lens of Edelman’s theory, the previously described conflict can instead be

seen as a dynamic tension. I argue that this tension, compounded by changing Taiwanese ideas about LGBTQ identity and current demographic issues, can be explained through the application of Lee Edelman's theory of reproductive futurism, whereby society is dependent upon reproduction to propagate itself and views protection of "the Child"<sup>1</sup> as its primary goal.<sup>2</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper will examine current conceptualizations of the LGBTQ community in Taiwan and how they interact with other societal trends, namely the Taiwanese idea of a homosexual identity, how that identity has come to be deployed and received in the public sphere, the ways in which the government has implicitly and explicitly responded, and current demographic issues. These will be studied through, as I see it, the lens of Lee Edelman's theory of reproductive futurism. His book often uses American or Western examples. Therefore, it is important to separate, as much as is possible, his ideas and theory from the specific examples he uses for evidence. Despite its American origin, I believe his theory is not limited to countries falling under the "Western" or "American" labels and is applicable to most societies, because although Edelman's theory is drawn from his experiences as a "Westerner," children and their wellbeing are a common concern across cultures. After researching Taiwan, I have come to see the many ways in which his theory can be applied. Edelman's theory of reproductive futurism seeks to explain politics, and thereby public thought and opinion, in relation to society's hope for the future. According to this framework, all of society is based around what Lee Edelman

terms “the Child.” This “Child” refers to the future generations of a country or society and is the future inheritor of that society, with all its accompanying benefits and drawbacks, and as such society believes it must always do its utmost to provide for its future generations. These as-yet-unborn children thus become the impetus for every political intervention as demonstrated by the constant pleas to provide a better future for our offspring (3).

One of the main goals of reproductive futurism is to protect the future generations of a society, an act often seen as extrapolitical (1), because there is no room to go against these figural children (2). Doing so would make the opponents seem like evil child haters. In order to offer such protection, society must champion innocence by safeguarding against exposure to obscenities and inappropriateness, including what these future children might discover about “dangerous ‘lifestyles’” via books or the internet (20). In this way real freedoms are restricted based on the needs of an imaginary social figure, as Edelman puts it:

That figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights ‘real’ citizens are allowed. For the social order exists to preserve for this universalized subject, this fantasmic Child, a notional freedom more highly valued than actual freedom, which might, after all, put at risk the Child to whom such a freedom falls due. (11)

Here Edelman describes a reason for part of the tension I argue for in this paper.

“Notional freedom,” or the rights and wellbeing of the future generations of society, is

more highly valued than “actual freedom,” or those rights given to actual living members of society. Any right given to those living members (in his discussion members of the LGBTQ community) which may negatively impact the coming children of a society is highly likely to be restricted.

The social order discussed in Edelman’s quote above is at the center of reproductive futurism and its relationship to the LGBTQ<sup>3</sup> community. Politics is used as a means of constructing and maintaining a desirable social order (2), and in the framework of reproductive futurism, anything which might prevent the next generation from being born is a threat to the social order itself (11). Since LGBTQ relationships are, for the most part, not based on reproduction, they and other queer relationships are viewed as a threat to the continuation of society (9). Therefore, no matter how liberal or radical the politics, if it works to maintain or better a social order, it is in actuality still conservative because it serves to affirm that social order with the purpose of passing it on to future generations of children (3). Ultimately, Edelman argues, any belief in the intrinsic value of our lives depends on futurism (11). Queer relationships thus represent the denial of that value, which is what results in the political intervention against them in the name of protecting and providing for the future generations of a society. Edelman’s theory will be applied in this paper when looking at explaining current trends in the Taiwanese LGBTQ community and the country at large. It will particularly focus on legislation passed by the Taiwanese government due to the intervention of Christian NGOs and the backlash of Christian family protection groups against what seems to be

the growing public expression and acceptance or at least tolerance of the LGBTQ community in Taiwan, as well as on the recent demographic changes on the island.

## LGBTQ AND THE TAIWANESE PUBLIC

*The Public Side of the Tension.* In the past few decades, Taiwan has developed a socially and politically visible LGBTQ community, marked by message boards, parades, and mass demonstrations (Lin; “Taiwan's Gay Parade;” Wang). However, this increased visibility has often been countered with government legislation and backlash from certain segments of the population, such as Christian NGOs and other family protection groups (Ho, “Queer Existence” 542). Though the growing visibility of sexuality in the public sphere in the past few decades provided a more permissive social climate, Taiwan’s gay community had already been in existence for some time.<sup>4</sup> Gay bars were around in Taipei in 1978. However, two such bars were raided by police that year in accordance with the Police Law regarding preserving cultural morality and policing prostitutes. In the eyes of the police (and by extension the government) at the time and in the early 1980’s, all homosexual men were considered prostitutes whether they actually participated in the trade or not (Hans 248). More gay restaurants and bars continued to be raided by police on suspicion of prostitution into the mid 1980’s (249). Police raided gay saunas in 1998 and gay home parties in 2004, exposing and humiliating those there (Ho, “Queer Existence” 540). I believe that by parading the participants out in front of the Taiwanese media, the police and the media were complicit in the commodification<sup>5</sup> of the mens’ bodies’ as not belonging to themselves but simply as material which would make

shocking and attention-grabbing (and therefore ratings-earning) material. The bodies of these gay men became nothing more than objects for the television audience to consume. In 2003, the police raided and confiscated the materials at Taiwan's only gay bookstore (Ho, "Queer Existence" 540), founded in 1999 (Cohn) and sentenced its owner the following year over the protestations of the gay community (Ho, "Queer Existence" 540).

The existence of such places in the first place shows how the social environment of Taiwan was gradually becoming more permitting of such gathering spaces and how the LGBTQ community was looking for ways to form such communal spaces. The actions of the police seem to counter these statements, but such events can be seen as typical in Taiwan, where the author Ni Jiazhen, a sex researcher in Taiwan, has pointed out that in post-martial Taiwan the gay and lesbian movement is continuously marked by opposing advances and retreats (Liu 520). This dynamic plays directly into the tension between greater public expression of LGBTQ sexuality and the recent legislative regulation of their sexuality that I discussed at the beginning of my paper. Although these laws do not explicitly target LGBTQ people, in actuality they are the ones disproportionately affected by them (Ho, "Queer Existence" 541). The gains made by the Taiwanese LGBTQ community through the formation of social places such as bars and bookstores and the harsh repercussions from the police can also be seen to follow this pattern.

In recent years, Taiwan has begun to be seen as an example of tolerance and acceptance of the LGBTQ community within Asia,<sup>6</sup> a region where no countries have legalized gay marriage. Taiwan is given this distinction, especially internationally, for



several reasons, most notably its recent history of hosting large LGBTQ demonstrations. Taiwan was the first country in the Chinese world to have a gay pride parade in 2003 (Cohn) with around 500 participants (“Taiwan's Gay Parade”), where the then-mayor of Taipei and now president of Taiwan, Ma Ying-jiu, pledged his support for the gay community. However, hundreds of marchers decided to wear masks to the event to avoid being identified. According to Cohn, the Taiwanese interviewed for his article said this desire for anonymity came from familial pressures. They explained that although Taiwanese society in general is rather indifferent when it comes to homosexuality, parents are no longer so accepting when it becomes a personal matter. It is viewed as making them lose face in front of their community (Cohn). Thus although the general idea of homosexuality is apparently not frightening to those concerned with the continuation of their family line, I believe this attitude demonstrates how once homosexuality directly poses a threat to reproduction, in this case of a specific family, it begins to be seen as a problem.

However, attitudes about visibility have changed since the inaugural gay pride parade. Since 2003, Taiwan has continued to host the event, which has become the largest in Asia (Lai) and even extended to other cities outside Taipei. On October 25, 2014, Taipei held its twelfth annual pride parade, and this time it was with a focus on inclusion of what the organizers called “the minority of the minority.” They wanted to draw awareness to those who are bisexual, intersex, asexual, transgender, and queer, not just what they saw as the publicly known gays and lesbians. In all, it attracted more than 50,000 people (“Taiwan's Gay Parade”). Far from the masks seen twelve years ago,

during and after the most recent parade Taiwanese were proudly displaying their involvement in the demonstration. One college student made both his cover photo and profile picture on Facebook a picture of him at the parade wrapped in a rainbow flag. The open-shirt worn by him and the shirtlessness of the other man in the pictures is part of the overall aesthetic of the parades, which often feature scantily clad men or men wearing outlandish accessories (Chen, José). By actively participating in and perhaps even initiating the commodification of their own bodies, I believe participants in the Pride Parade have learned to take something which used to be deployed against them and are now using it to their advantage, taking all the negative attention which was once given to their bodies from both the media and the police in association with prostitution (Hans 248) and using it to draw attention to something of their own choosing: their efforts to gain equal rights in terms of marriage. Not long ago, houses were raided and gay men were paraded in front of news cameras as examples of moral degradation (Ho, “Queer Existence” 540). Now, however, it seems to me that certain marchers are reveling in that same attention as it no longer comes with such a heavy stigma of prostitution. Rather than fearing humiliation or retaliation like those exposed in the police raid on the home party in 2004, the tens of thousands of Taiwanese who participated in the recent Gay Pride parades (“Taiwan’s Gay Parade”) now seem to consider being part of the LGBTQ community a part of their identity, demonstrated by their eagerness to make it known that they participated in an event like the pride parade.

Taiwan’s LGBTQ community has not been limited to only pride parades when it comes to demonstrating for equal rights, particularly the right to marriage. In 2011, about

eighty lesbian couples participated in “Barbie and Barbie’s Wedding,” a mass, though not legally binding, lesbian wedding ceremony where eighty couples dressed up, exchanged rings, said “I do,” and received certificates saying they were “united in holy matrimony.” It was held in the hopes of raising support for legalization of gay marriage on the island (Wang). A year later in 2012, two lesbians were married in what Lai calls the first same-sex “Buddhist” wedding in Taiwan (Lai).<sup>7</sup> The Buddhist wedding was not the only mass demonstration or publicly followed event in the Taiwanese LGBTQ community in recent years. On September 7, 2013, more than 1,000 people celebrated at a mock gay wedding banquet outside Taipei City Hall in support of legalization of gay marriage. Politicians from the ruling Kuomintang and the Democratic Progressive Party privately sponsored the event and a Taiwanese pop star taped a message of congratulations and encouragement to the couple being honored at the banquet (“1000 Join”). I believe that the public support of prominent politicians and celebrities, as well as the sheer number of demonstrations, indicates growing public acceptance of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community. However, the response of some conservative family protection groups to the wedding banquet demonstrates the attitudes of those reacting within the framework of reproductive futurism and how those beliefs can be translated into public policy. A coalition of family groups called a meeting with the media to express their continued support of what the article calls “traditional family values,” and the group’s fear of the dissolution of the Taiwanese family (“1000 Join”). Bearing in mind reproductive futurism, the direct correlation of the legalization of same-sex marriage with the destruction of family clearly demonstrates the group’s belief that queer relationships pose a threat to the

future generations of Taiwan. The article also briefly mentioned a pastor who stated his belief that the legalization of same-sex marriage would increase already high divorce rates and cause low birth rates to drop even further (“1,000 Join”). I believe this is another prime example of the prejudices of reproductive futurism at work. The people demonstrating at the banquet were not discussing children at all, but an argument brought against them was that if same-sex couples were given the right to marry, the Taiwanese family and the birth of future generations needed to continue society would be threatened.

Despite the negative commentary, the government has offered some measures of equality for members of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community. Several laws have been passed which aim for the protection and equality of its members. The Ministry of Education requires that tolerance of gays and lesbians should be part of textbooks and openly gay and lesbian citizens can serve in the national army. Laws have also been passed to combat discrimination in the workplace (Jacobs).

Members of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community have also found greater opportunities for community and interaction through the internet. It has proved an invaluable resource for information for those made marginal by contemporary Taiwanese society (Ho, “Queer Existence” 541). Whether looking to explore their sexuality or simply to find reassurance in the fact that they are no longer isolated, the internet has given the Taiwanese LGBTQ community a place to do so (Lin 272). A specific instance can be seen in an online community of queer males performing what author Dennis Lin calls “sissinesses,” referring to “queered effeminacies” (271). In the late 1990’s and early 2000’s Taiwan’s local gay magazines were part of what the author terms “ever-growing

sissyphobia and sissy lesbianphobia” (272) within the Taiwanese gay community. The presence of the internet allowed those queer males who wished to perform sissinesses and explore their sexuality a relatively anonymous and safe space in which to do so and a place in which to actively resist the Taiwanese gay community’s masculine pressures (273). Trans subjects in Taiwan have also found a measure of empowerment through the internet by using it to make friendships and find information otherwise nearly impossible to attain in a society which views them largely with suspicion (Ho, “Embodying Gender” 232). Both the growing number of public demonstrations detailed above and the development of large online communities form the first part of the tension that I argue surrounds the LGBTQ community in Taiwan. Such demonstrations are what give Taiwan its international reputation as an accepting country. However, beneath this superficial image the reality for Taiwanese LGBTQ is actually quite different.

*Restrictive Legislation.* As mentioned earlier, legislation regarding members of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community has a tendency towards gains and backlashes. Although they have been able to find empowerment and a sense of belonging through both the internet and public demonstrations (Ho, “Embodying Gender” 232), recently enacted laws have severely restricted what those social spaces might have become. Instead of being able to use the resources offered on the internet without restriction and having full uncensored access to the communities there, Taiwanese LGBTQ are facing what amounts to censorship in the name of child protection. This is not the first time sexuality has been regulated by the Taiwanese government. A law put into effect in 1953, entitled the Police

Law, gave the police the duty of “redressing the customs” and “maintaining virtuous customs,” which in large part amounted to the punishment of sexual misconduct and regulation of the well-established sex work industry (Hans 238). In the 1970’s and 80’s the police still acted as though most, if not all, homosexual men were involved in the sex industry and punished them accordingly (248). A section of the anti-prostitution law entitled “Law to Suppress Sexual Transaction Involving Children and Juveniles” amended in 1999, quoted by Josephine Chuen-juei Ho, says

anyone found using electronic signals and Internet or other media to publish or broadcast messages that seduce, broker, insinuate or by other means cause one to be involved in sexual transactions is to be sentenced to a fixed-term imprisonment of up to five years, which may carry an attendant fine of up to NT\$1,000,000 dollars. (541)

Thus it does not matter whether or not any such electronic transaction actually happened; posting it on the internet was cause for the police to prosecute the poster. Under this law, between 2000 and 2008 more than 20,000 Taiwanese were indicted, although only a quarter of the cases resulted in a conviction (Ho, “Queer Existence” 541). As the internet is such an important resource for members of the LGBTQ community in Taiwan to find information and make contact with others, this law has disproportionately affected them (541). The Children and Juvenile’s Welfare Act of 2003, which included any person eighteen or younger, instituted a new ratings system which censored, among other things, sexually explicit published material (542). Literature was one of very few places in which young Taiwanese LGBTQ were able to find representation, and suddenly it was now off

limits (543). A new rating system for web content in 2005 encouraged self-labeling and restricting anything which might not be suitable for children, which included any mention of homosexuality, in order to avoid fines (543). In my mind, these restrictions play exactly into what Edelman's theory predicts about the restrictions of rights of real living citizens in order to protect the figural future generations from harm, which in this case is homosexuality. Actual living people were prosecuted and had their lives turned upside down because legislators were concerned about what some child, somewhere, at some unspecified point in time might come across on the internet.

It is not only individual gays and lesbians who have been disproportionately affected by these new child protection laws. Josephine Ho, the director of The Center for the Study of Sexualities at National Central University,<sup>8</sup> was the subject of a formal complaint filed in court in Taiwan by eleven Christian and conservative groups. The groups claimed she was "spreading obscenity" by providing informational links on the website for the Center's database. Activism from marginal groups within Taiwan and an international petition allowed her defense to be taken seriously and both the district and high court found her not guilty (Ho, "Queer Existence" 542). By basing their argument on claims of obscenity, the groups were attempting to force a prosecution through the child protection laws regarding online content deemed harmful for children. Despite being a purely informational link, once again the possibility that somewhere in Taiwan, some child might stumble upon it was apparently so great and so dangerous that the justice system was the only way to protect that imaginary child.

Those child protection laws were the product of specific cultural policy making efforts. Many of the Christian NGOs discussed earlier have been instrumental in the formation of these laws and many are active parts of councils and hold great sway over cultural policy-making in Taiwan. Many of the conservative Christian NGOs in Taiwan began as charities after the lifting of martial law in 1987. Now they are present and variably known as women's groups, children's groups, general citizen's groups, and charities (Ho, "Queer Existence" 544). The influence of these groups can in part be attributed to the complex global power dynamics surrounding Taiwan. When both China and Taiwan claim to be the legitimate government of China, other countries of the world are forced to choose which to officially recognize. Since China has emerged as more economically powerful in recent years, many countries have chosen to recognize it as the official Chinese government (Yang 507). Thus Taiwan is eager to capitalize on any connections which would create or strengthen international ties in order to approximate legitimacy (Ho, "Queer Existence" 548). Although Christians accounted for only 4.6% of the Taiwanese population in 2005 (Lo 179), their NGOs have been able to assert their influence over legislation because of their international connections. Many are internationally affiliated (Ho, "Queer Existence" 548), and some, like the Garden of Hope Foundation, have won a number of prestigious international awards ("Milestones"). These groups use their power to influence policies affecting the lives of LGBTQ people across Taiwan, all in the name of child protection. The main focus of these NGOs remains the protection of the women and children of Taiwan, especially young women in the sex industry ("Background"). I can find no mention on their websites of official



positions on Taiwanese LGBTQ issues. However, as Edelman stated would happen under reproductive futurism, the laws backed by these NGOs demonstrate a willingness to indirectly restrict the rights of LGBTQ in favor of the protection of future generations of Taiwanese children.

Other groups are more outright in their stance against the expansion of rights for the LGBTQ community. One such group, “Taiwan Defends the Household” (*Taiwan shouhu jiating*) has a page on its website listing six reasons to oppose gay marriage (“6 Reasons”) and another citing studies which detail the possible effects of being raised in a gay or lesbian household, such as a girl raised in a two-mother household being more likely to be bisexual, engage in sexual activity with the same sex, use dangerous birth control methods, have a baby out of wedlock, or an abortion. This is followed by a comment that all this will “hurt society’s good customs” (“The Effect”). From examining this website, I believe it becomes clear that reproductive futurism is at work. When seeking to oppose same-sex marriage and expanded family rights, the group has chosen to rely on the argument that to do so would be harmful to children. It apparently believes this is the best way to appeal to the concerns of its readers and that demonstrating a threat to future Taiwanese children will be the most effective way to convince others of the dangers of equal rights for same-sex couples.<sup>9</sup> Such groups are almost entirely Christian groups, and though Christians accounted for only 4.6% of the Taiwanese population in 2005 (Lo 179), they have been able to affect major changes in public policy (Ho, “Queer Existence” 548). Though perhaps not officially affiliated, the Christian NGOs and the conservative family protection groups demonstrate the workings of reproductive futurism

in different ways. When looking at the restrictions on the Taiwanese LGBTQ community that I argue form second half of the current tension, the Christian NGOs and the conservative family protection groups have taken both subtle and overt routes to denying their rights, the NGOs as a result of policies they support and the family groups due to Christian beliefs about family formation and its effect on children. The Christian NGOs have worked to enact child protection laws which, although they do not specifically mention homosexuality, severely limit the ways in which the Taiwanese LGBTQ community is able to interact and access information through the internet and literature. These laws demonstrate that the freedom of the figural child to go where he or she wants and do what he or she pleases without having to worry about any possible negative influence from exposure to unhealthy lifestyles takes precedence over the freedom of actual members of society to communicate freely. The conservative Taiwanese family protection groups are more overt in their reasoning for opposing equal rights for LGBTQ people, saying that same-sex marriage and families will result in lower birth rates, girls being more likely to have abortions, and even the end of the Taiwanese family itself. Clearly, as Edelman predicted, members of the LGBTQ community are denied their rights because they are viewed as a threat to the continuation of Taiwanese society.

#### LANGUAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

By participating in public demonstrations and becoming such active members of online societies, I believe members of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community are changing the concept of what it means to be LGBTQ in a Chinese culture today. This definition or

construction of identity is something which can be seen in the language used to talk about homosexuality and queerness in Taiwan today (Lim 236). Before the early twentieth century, there was no word in Chinese equivalent to the English term “homosexual.” Instead, when talking about a man who engaged in a relationship or a sexual act with another man, an author might have said it was something he “enjoys” rather than something that man “is” (236). Author Katie King discusses the importance of language and labels when she talks about how certain cultures or individuals resist the label of “lesbian” because they believe it does not accurately describe their own local sexual practices and identities (37). She also discusses how labels can be used to form specific political formations (38). From these women’s resistance, I would argue that resistance to a label is due to ideas about what that label says about one’s identity. From there it can be further argued that labeling of a behavior or personality trait means it is incorporated into identity. I believe that under previous Chinese thoughts about sexuality compared to what King describes, identity is separated from action. One could not point at a man on the street and declare “That man is gay.” Having sex and who one had it with was something one *did*, not something one *was*. As long as a man’s actions did not prevent him from continuing the Confucian patriarchal family order based on the Five Relationships<sup>10</sup> (Archie) and the concept of filial piety<sup>11</sup> (Zeng 15-16), his manhood and actions would not be called into question (Brownell and Wasserstrom 32). Since identity was separate from action, such actions did not necessarily preclude that man from also being married and having children, since doing so would not be considered going against his identity.

However, after the early twentieth century, a Westernization of the concept of homosexuality took place, one which can be identified through an examination of the language used to discuss it (Lim 236). During this time, homosexuality emerged as a new and concrete social category, evidenced by the appearance of a specific word for homosexual men and women. This word is a translation of the English word “homosexual” (*tongxinglian*) and literally means “same-sex love” (236). This remains a rather formal term for homosexuality and is taught in well-respected Mandarin textbooks in Taiwan to this day (“*Tongxinglian*”). Once again, based on King’s work I argue that having a label means such a label can be incorporated into a person’s identity, since a label seems to convey a sense of permanency. According to King, a label seems to assume a set of behaviors which are most often automatically ascribed to the person being labeled, whether or not they actually all apply (37). This therefore removes the distinction between identity and action. Thus, in the Chinese speaking world, with the arrival of the word *tongxinglian* sexuality itself was no longer an action or set of actions but a label and therefore identity which could be given and was consequently more difficult to change.

Taiwanese are not simply relying on a Western concept for their LGBTQ identity and identification. In the past twenty years, a new term has emerged: *tongzhi*, whose characters literally mean “same will” or “same ideal,” (Lim 237) and which has specific meaning for the Chinese speaking community both linguistically and historically (235). First used to describe same-sex sexuality in 1989 by organizers of a gay and lesbian film festival in Hong Kong, the term made its way to Taiwan in 1992 when Taiwan’s biggest

movie awards, the Taipei Golden Horse festival, had a section featuring gay and lesbian films. However, it is the historical context of the word which makes it more relevant to the Taiwanese identity. The term was a translation of the Soviet Communist word “comrade” and became popularly used in China following the words of Sun Yat-sen, considered the father of the Chinese Republic (237), who said “The revolution has yet to triumph; comrades must work hard” (quoted in Song 237). The term has since gained popularity for many reasons, a few of which are its gender neutrality, the way it defies the Western concept of homo-hetero dichotomy, and the native connotation and concept already associated with the word (238). There is also the possibility that the adoption of a word so widely used in China as an LGBTQ descriptor was meant to be a bit of a political ribbing of China. The enthusiasm with which *tongzhi* has been embraced leads me to believe that as a label it is causing sexuality to become even more entrenched in the identity of many members of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community than ever before.

The equivalent of the English word “queer” is also one which has only recently begun to enter the Taiwanese lexicon. In the early 1990’s in Taiwan it was simply translated along with same-sex sexuality as *tongzhi*. However, other translations also began to appear. One word, *guaitai*, which literally means “strange fetus,” was already in use as a slang word for an eccentric person, so its use was partly an attempt to recreate the double meaning of the English word “queer” (Lim 238). The translation most widely used, however, is the word *ku’er*, whose pronunciation approximates that of the English word. This is a translation which also contains specific linguistic meanings. The first character of the word, *ku*, can mean extremely, cruel, or oppressive. It is also a slang

loanword from English which is used to mean “cool,” as in interesting. *Er* means child or son (235). *Ku’er* remains much less widely used than *tongzhi* (239). In the use of the terms *tongzhi* and *ku’er* and their respective meanings and contexts, the Chinese speaking community, of which Taiwan is a part, went from having no word for same-sex sexuality to having a separate social category complete with multiple possible identifying terms. Ideas cannot be conveyed without the language necessary to communicate them. In light of King’s work, I believe that with the creation of labels for various forms of sexuality, many Taiwanese now construct a sexual identity which was previously nonexistent in their language and culture. With sexuality as an identity and no longer an action or set of actions, there is much less room in society for a person to engage in both same-sex relationships and heterosexual relationships, and therefore reproduction. Thus, in light of reproductive futurism, these changing ideas about sexual identity have direct repercussions on the probability of the birth of future generations. When Taiwanese take up the label of *tongzhi*, *guaitai*, *ku’er*, or any other number of sexual identities, according to King’s findings about why people do and do not accept certain labels of their sexuality, the Taiwanese themselves seem to assume the set of actions believed to be consistent with those labels. According to King, labels are accepted when the behaviors associated with them are believed to match up with a person’s actions (37). Going against those behaviors or actions would therefore be inconsistent with Taiwanese self-labeling as *tongzhi*, *guaitai*, or *ku’er*. In Chinese, there are two ways to say “I am.” For ephemeral states, those that are easily subject to change, no form of the verb “to be” is used. For instance, if a Chinese speaker wanted to say “I am cold,” he or she would say “*wo hen*

*leng*,” which literally is “I very cold.” However, for essential states, conditions or qualities that are difficult or impossible to change, Chinese speakers use the verb *shi*. If one was to say “I am Taiwanese,” it would be “*wo shi Taiwan ren*.” When declaring themselves as *tongzhi*, Taiwanese do not consider it a passing state. One protest sign said “*wo shi jiao’ao tongzhi*,” meaning “I am proud to be a *tongzhi*,” or “I am a proud *tongzhi*” (Engbarth). Clearly, sexual orientation is considered an essential part of Taiwanese LGBTQ identity. The stronger that sense of sexual identity, the further it takes members of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community from continuing the Confucian family order.

Before the introduction of the term “homosexual” into the Chinese language, there was no concept of a sexual identity in Chinese culture. The fact that a man had sex with another man did not mean he was not also free to marry a woman and reproduce. In modern Taiwanese society, once a man or woman has been labeled as gay or lesbian, the chance of them defying the label and marrying someone of the opposite sex and reproducing goes down dramatically. As labels become more numerous and more specific to Taiwanese culture rather than simply being imported from the West, this could lend a greater sense of urgency to the tension between greater public acceptance and greater regulation in the name of child protection and reproduction.

#### THE DEMOGRAPHIC DILEMMA

The self-construction of any of these non-heterosexual identities severely limits Taiwanese LGBTQ when it comes to social resources regarding reproductive and family rights like in-vitro fertilization and adoption (United States 12). When considering the

demographic challenges currently facing Taiwan, the denial of these resources becomes especially significant. As seen above, regulations affecting the LGBTQ community in Taiwan and debates about their rights are often framed in the context of general sexual regulation to protect children and juveniles. Laws were put in place to protect children from accessing any possible obscenity and same-sex marriage was practically equated with the crumbling of the foundation of society, the family. Such debates are always rooted in concern for the reproduction of future generations of children. While the welfare of children might be a common concern among members of society, most of the push in Taiwan for regulation regarding their protection has come from a small minority. They have been able to affect great changes in Taiwanese politics because their fears for the future are not entirely unfounded. Looking at demographic trends in Taiwan over the past forty years or so reveals how the reproduction necessary to maintain the growth and wellbeing of the country is a very real cause for concern (Haub & Kaneda 16).

The demographic transition model used in this section was developed in 1929 by an American demographer named Warren Thompson (Montgomery). Montgomery provides a thorough yet concise explanation of the model, and the model remains widely taught and accepted by many demographers based in the West as a basic way of helping to explain why certain demographic trends have been seen throughout history, starting in Europe and continuing all over the world since the Western Industrial Revolution, as well as to predict how certain trends might play out in the future (Weeks 89-90; Thio 365; Macionis 521; Giddens, Duneier, & Appelbaum 635). Since this model has so far proven itself to apply to the majority of countries in the world and demographers have noticed



aspects of it in Taiwan (Tsay & Chu 324), I have chosen to apply it to Taiwan's own recent demographic changes to illustrate the significant ways in which it has not followed this model and what that means for the country.

Though some countries experience the rather gradual transitions described by the demographic transition model,<sup>12</sup> in Taiwan, demographic changes have come at a striking pace. In 1970 in Taiwan, the total fertility rate was 3.9. By 2013 it had plummeted to 1.1 (Haub and Kaneda 16). Before 1950, Taiwan was mostly an agrarian society (Hans 242) and agriculture was the biggest sector in its economy. As of 2011, agriculture counted for less than two percent of the national GDP (Rigger 57). Taiwan is one of the top fifteen trading countries in the world, and much of its economy is focused on human-capital intensive information technology industry (41). These factors align with both models of demographic transitions and what causes the changes in each of the stages. However, the speed with which Taiwan has progressed through these changes is what makes their demographic situation a cause for concern. Excluding Hong Kong since it is a city and only has a population of 7.2 million people, Taiwan has the lowest fertility rate in the entire world at 1.1. This means that the average woman is only having one child in her life, well below the replacement rate of 2.1. Notably, this rapid drop in fertility rate happened without any government intervention like the one-child policy implemented in China to curb population growth and population momentum. In fact, by the mid-2050's Taiwan's population is expected to shrink by ten percent from 23.5 million to 21 million (Haub and Kaneda 16). By 2017, Taiwan will become an aged society, where more than fourteen percent of the population is sixty-five or above and will become a super-aged

society, where that figure reaches twenty percent, by 2025 (Republic of China). Without children to replenish and support this aging population, by 2045 there will only be 1.45 people supporting every elderly person in Taiwan, as opposed to the current seven (Branigan). I would argue that any society based upon reproductive futurism would see these statistics and be extremely concerned for its future. Children represent the continuation of society and it is society's responsibility to protect them, but if not enough children are being born, the entire system is in danger. However, if a society is based on reproductive futurism, the denial of rights to the LGBTQ community in the name of child protection would also be present. This is exactly what has happened in Taiwan when policies were put in place to address its demographic issues.

The Taiwanese government has enacted policies to encourage couples to have children by implementing subsidies for healthcare for children under eighteen in the low and middle-to-low income brackets. It also offers employees covered by health insurance (both men and women) who decide to take unpaid parental leave sixty percent of their normal salary for up to six months. (Republic of China). The Taipei city government in particular has gone even further in an effort to encourage reproduction. They have created a "birth allowance" of NT \$2000, around \$650 USD, available to every couple after every birth. Notably, these children must come from registered households. Taipei also provides subsidized health care for children under five, as well as tuition-free kindergarten and after school care of kindergarten and elementary school children. The city government offers a screening for Down syndrome and a "pre-pregnancy health check *after marriage*" [italics added] ("Pregnancy Subsidy"). Despite this apparent desire

for more babies to be born, fertility treatments remain unavailable for women who are not married (United States 12). I believe that the restrictions placed on these resources are a subtle example of the prejudices of reproductive futurism at work. The resources were made available in order to promote the birth of children in families, which directly relates to Edelman's theory where concern for the existence and welfare of future generations is most important to society but queer relationships are seen as a threat to those future children. Therefore, despite the urgency of Taiwan's demographic issues, these resources are only available to married couples. Since same-sex couples are not legally allowed to marry in Taiwan, they do not have access to these subsidies, parental leave, and other benefits afforded to married new parents. Aside from denying them the right to have children of their own, I believe the biggest issue for the LGBTQ community is the way the government's policies are promoting and normalizing heterosexual relationships. By making birth resources only available to married couples and not permitting same-sex couples to marry, the Taiwanese government is essentially broadcasting that it believes a two-parent, heterosexual household to be the only one which it will support, the only one it believes is fit to raise and provide for the future members of its society. Clearly, by rejecting legislation which would have legalized same-sex marriage the government revealed its belief that such a thing would not have been beneficial to society. If it was under the impression that same-sex marriage would be good for its citizens, or at the very least not detrimental, the bill would have passed. The denial of birth resources to same-sex couples is just one more way the Taiwanese government is showing how it believes queer relationships to be harmful to society. Outside of communication on the internet

and representation within literature, the denial of reproductive rights of the Taiwanese LGBTQ community demonstrates another aspect of the tensions between a more publicly accepted community and continued restriction in the name of Taiwan's future generations.

## CONCLUSIONS

These diverse threads of public expression, sexual regulation, language and identity, and demography can be woven together around the Taiwanese LGBTQ community to form a picture of their current place in Taiwanese society. Looking at these threads through the lens of Edelman's theory of reproductive futurism is what brings this picture into focus. In my mind, his theory most applies when queer relationships try to obtain the same societal position as heterosexual relationships, and are therefore threatening to the continuation and legitimacy of those heterosexual relationships. This societal positioning can be seen in Taiwan in the push for the legalization of gay marriage and the expansion of family and adoption rights for gay couples (Ho, "Queer Existence" 540). When looking at the idea of an LGBTQ identity in Taiwan, the repercussions of reproductive futurism become clear. As previously discussed, in the past in Mainland China same-sex acts could occur without necessitating a concrete sexual identity (Lim 236). Therefore, before the arrival of a "Western" idea of sexual identity, a same-sex relationship perhaps did not necessarily preclude opposite-sex marriage and reproduction. These same-sex acts thus would not oppose reproductive futurism. However, after contact with England in the nineteenth century, a label emerged for those who participated in same-sex sex acts, and recently new labels have emerged for members of

the LGBTQ community in Taiwan, and with them new identities. With the attachment of a label such as *tongzhi*, or homosexual, Taiwanese are concretely defining their sexuality. By labeling their sexuality, Taiwanese LGBTQ are saying that the behaviors associated with their chosen label match up with their actions. For many people, something considered such an integral part of identity is not easily changed, and so once identities not focused on reproduction became more common, they became a problem, leading to many of these current issues.

The problems caused when one presents being LGBTQ as an integral part of one's identity can be seen in the great number of Taiwanese participants who wore masks in their first Gay Pride Parade. The marchers said that even though Taiwanese do not seem to care much about homosexuality, when it comes to someone parents know personally such as their son or daughter they are not nearly as accepting because it makes them lose face (Cohn). Thus, when homosexuality is not a personal issue, it is apparently not a problem. However, once homosexuality enters one's own family and consequently threatens that family's prospects at continuing due to the non-reproductive relationship, it suddenly becomes undesirable, demonstrating a microcosm of a society based on reproductive futurism's problem with the LGBTQ community.

The greatest evidence of Edelman's theory at work is in Taiwan's legislative activities. At the urging of conservative groups, Taiwan has passed restrictive laws that are solely to protect its future generations. The concern for the morality and innocence of those figural children is what motivated the new ratings systems, which were de facto new censorship systems for youth with a very large spillover into the all-ages online

community. If containing allusions to homosexuality is enough to make a comic book unfit for minors, then that sends the message that all parts of the homosexual identity or experience are unfit for children.

By framing homosexual relationships as harmful to or unfit for children, these child protection laws are implicitly agreeing with the family protection groups in Taiwan, notably the one mentioned above, “Taiwan Protects the Household.” This group considers the effect and danger of being raised in a household by two same-sex parents so great that it has its own webpage on their website. And that webpage is not an afterthought, something only found after scouring the website; it is a key feature, requiring only that the mouse hover over a link, which will bring down a menu with the link to that page. Clearly, what is at issue here is not just gay marriage itself but what such a thing would mean for the children of Taiwan, or more generally the future of Taiwanese society as represented by its children. And apparently what would result would “hurt society’s good customs” (“The Effect”)

When looking at Taiwanese demographics through the lens of reproductive futurism, securing its future in the form of children is the focus of other preemptive policies put in place by the Taiwanese government. Laws have already been enacted to protect Taiwan’s future generations. However, if there are no children to protect then society cannot continue to propagate itself and the entire social system is at risk of failing. The Taiwanese government seems to believe that when the heterosexual population is unable to sustain itself without any impediments, accepting the LGBTQ community and granting them the right to marriage when their relationships are most often not based

upon reproduction would just add one more obstacle to promoting the importance of children and their necessity to society. Showing their concern about low birth rates through all the policies put in place to promote childbirth while continuing to deny fertility treatments to unmarried women (United States 12) illustrates that though the Taiwanese government considers the low birth rate to be a cause for concern, the damage a same-sex family might do to a child is regarded as a bigger danger. By denying same-sex couples the right to marriage, the Taiwanese government is not only explicitly discriminating against same-sex couples, it is also taking a stance against the LGBTQ community in another way. Many forms of government aid, such as the pregnancy subsidy (“Pregnancy Subsidy”) and fertility treatments (United States 12), are only available to married couples. Thus no matter what the Taiwanese government might say or do to the contrary, with these policies it is promoting the continued social normalization of heterosexual relationships. Since women are not legally permitted to marry women, they are barred from receiving this aid, which is moot in any case because without fertility treatment (not available outside marriage) there is no possibility of pregnancy. Notably, in other areas such as employment and education, discrimination against LGBTQ has been made illegal and can be penalized (Jacobs). However, as reproductive futurism would predict, in the section of the law which deals with children, Taiwanese LGBTQ remain left out. The government wants to protect the future generations by ensuring they are raised in a (to a Westerner) typical nuclear family, since the multigenerational family previously common in Taiwanese society might no longer be feasible. By only giving the benefits to married heterosexual couples, the Taiwanese

government is essentially advertising what it believes to be the ideal family for raising the future members of its society. Same-sex couples are apparently so undesirable as parents to “the Child” that they are not only denied the right to marry but also almost every other reproductive right and resource as well. Even with such a huge population issue hanging over its head, Taiwan is still concentrating on preserving and encouraging as close as possible to traditional family forms. The threat posed by same-sex parenthood apparently looms larger than any population issues.

Though Taiwan superficially appears to be a rather accepting country of its LGBTQ community, with huge parades, celebrity well-wishers, and an active online community, beneath that surface are tensions negatively affecting every LGBTQ in Taiwan. Laws aimed at protecting Taiwan’s future and figural generations are both implicitly and explicitly excluding members of Taiwan’s LGBTQ community from full equality, particularly in areas of communication such as the internet and reproductive and family rights like marriage, government resources and subsidies, and fertility treatments. Taiwan is certainly a leader in Asia when it comes to LGBTQ rights (Lai), and in many ways life as an LGBTQ person in Taiwan has vastly improved in the past few decades. However, the Taiwanese LGBTQ community still has a long way to go before its members are able to recognize the full equality they deserve. That is why I believe the first people who chose to say *tongzhi* could not have picked a more fitting word because, in the words of Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the revolution in China against the Qing Dynasty, “The revolution has yet to triumph; comrades must work hard” (quoted in Song 237).



### Notes

1. Understood to be anyone under the legal age of adulthood, in the case of Taiwan anyone under twenty years old.
2. As many of the regulations which have affected the Taiwanese LGBTQ community are framed in the context of child protection, I believe Edelman's theory is especially applicable in this case.
3. The "Q" in LGBTQ stands for "queer." It is an umbrella term for all LGBTQ people. This label is often viewed as a political statement as well as a declaration of sexual orientation because it supports a break from binary thinking, saying that gender identity and sexual orientation are not always set in stone. It is also sometimes used as a "simple label to explain a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires" ("Definition of Terms").
4. Most of the scholarship I was able to find, and most of the material used in this paper, seems to focus much more on gay males in Taiwan than on lesbian females. Research in the gender studies field that does focus on Taiwanese women tends to be concentrate on sex trafficking and the sex work industry. I do not want to make uninformed speculations as to the reason, but perhaps it could somehow be linked to what female-female relationships represent (or oppose) in terms of reproduction. There is also the chance that the reluctance to discuss female-female relationships or the way male-male relationships seem to be better represented and studied could be influenced by other aspects of Chinese and Taiwanese culture. It is a promising topic for future research.
5. The process by which anything, including people, is reduced from something having intrinsic value to something which only has extrinsic value in terms of how much money

can be made from it (Felluga). Therefore, a person whose body has been commodified is only worth as much as the amount of money their body can make, whether it is through advertisements or something like a news story.

6. A 2014 article in the New York Times was titled “For Asia's Gays, Taiwan Stands Out as Beacon” (Jacobs).

7. I could find no mention of specific marriage customs in several books about Buddhism in Taiwan, so I gather that the ceremony itself is not “traditional” or going against the grain. This wedding does constitute a landmark event in a country with such strong Buddhist influences and such a strong Buddhist presence. Taiwan has the world’s largest Buddhist nun population, and six million Taiwanese, or about a quarter of the population, identify as Buddhist. There are also many ways in which Buddhist practice has entered and blended into Taiwanese folk religion (Rigger 106).

8. It is a member of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture, and Society (“Center for the Study”) and advocates a sex-positive attitude and conducts sex research (Ho, “Queer Existence” 542).

9. One of several websites linked to by “Taiwan Defends the Household” contains an article which explicitly talks about “Taiwan’s population problem” (*Taiwan renkou wenti*). It talks about how if all the babies aborted in Taiwan were still alive, there would likely be no population problem. In the sort of roundup-like newsletter, it proclaims that if parents continuously love their gay children, one day their children will “turn around” (*huizhuan*), and once they have been saved, parents have to use love to forgive them (“Safeguarding”). This demonstrates that being anything other than a heterosexual

capable of continuing the family means one is in need of forgiveness. However, such forgiveness can only be bestowed once the threat is gone and the possibility of reproduction is a reality again.

10. According to Confucius, government and social order exist when people know their social role and work to fulfil it (Confucius). People are also bound by a network of four hierarchical relationships between ruler and ruled, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother. They are also part of friend and friend relationships, the only one of mutual societal position (Archie).

11. Filial piety means honoring parents and ancestors, treating them well, providing for them, making a good name for the family, and a host of other responsibilities. A core concept is providing male heirs to continue the family line and continue to honor and worship the ancestors of a family (Zeng 15-16).

12. The following information (aside from a sentence cited as coming from work by Griers and Ranier) comes entirely from a general model of demographic transition explained by Keith Montgomery. The model itself is not his work but was developed in 1929 by an American demographer named Warren Thompson (Montgomery). In this general model of demographic transition, countries pass through four stages characterized by different demographic trends. In the first stage, birth and death rates are roughly equal, leading to the slow growth of a low population. The second stage is characterized by a population explosion where birth rates stay the same or increase slightly and fertility rates (Montgomery), the total number of children the average woman will have in her lifetime ("Fertility Rate"), remain stable but death rates plummet due to better sanitation and

improvements in healthcare in general. Stage three shows a move towards greater population stability as birth and fertility rates begin to decline along with death rates. Montgomery explains that this change is caused by children being perceived as less necessary to families. Before, when death rates were high and societies tended to be more agrarian, parents needed to have as many children as possible to provide labor on farms and to ensure that there would be someone to take care of them as they aged and became too old to work. However, when infant mortality rates decline, there is no longer a need to have so many children as there is a higher likelihood the ones that are born will survive to adulthood. Urbanization also leads to lower birth and fertility rates since raising children in urban areas is more expensive than in rural ones (Montgomery). It has been proposed that the makeup and volume of a country's international trade also has an effect on fertility rates, that the more human capital (skilled labor) required in an economy and the greater its reliance on technology-intensive industries (Gries and Rainer 1166), the lower the fertility rates will go as parents decide that it makes more sense to have fewer but better-educated children than to have many unskilled children (1167). However, in stage three population still tends to increase due to population momentum. In the fourth stage of demographic transition the population stabilizes and becomes older with the fertility rate sometimes going below replacement levels, causing a swift decline in population. Normally, these changes take quite some time to run their course, sometimes taking almost 200 years to progress from the start of stage two to the start of stage four (Montgomery). While it would be a mistake to take an overly simplistic viewpoint and assume that all countries will exactly follow this model or that the demographic changes

are entirely due to urbanization and not because of other factors, demographic transition theory has shown itself to be flexible enough to more or less apply to many countries outside of Europe as they experience their own industrialization. This model has shown widespread application as evidenced by its widespread use today (Weeks 89-90; Thio 365; Macionis 521; Giddens, Duneier, & Appelbaum 635) and remains a useful tool in examining national demographic trends.

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